

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4104

INFO AMCCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 4513

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINS ET US

SUBJ: DISCUSSION WITH PMAC CHAIRMAN ON RESOLUTION OF THE
ERITREAN PROBLEM

1. I HAD BEEN SEEKING AN APPOINTMENT WITH PMAC CHAIRMAN TEFERI
WITH THE MAIN PURPOSE OF QUESTIONING HIM ABOUT THE EPMG'S PUBLIC
POSITION ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ELF/PLF IN ERITREA, AND OF
URGING THE EPMG TO CLARIFY IT S POSITION IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT.
I HAD ALSO HOPED TO ELICIT FROM HIM STATEMENTS ON THE EPMG'S
ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS THAT MIGHT BE PLAYED BACK PRIVATELY
TO ARABS (PARTICULARLY EGYPTIANS AND SAUDIS) TO GET
FURTHER DIALOGUE GOING ON DESIRABILITY OF DISSIDENTS ABANDONING
THEIR PRECONDITION OF INDEPENDENCE AND COMING TO THE CONFERENCE
TABLE. I HAD VERY LIMITED SUCCESS, THE CHAIRMAN INSISTING ON
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SPENDING MOST OF THE HOUR AND 30 MINUTES ON A DIFFERENT SUBJECT:
THAT OF ALLEGED US INATTENTION TO AND LACK OF SUPPORT FOR THE

EPMG'S NEEDS (REPORTED SEPTEL). IN RESPONSE TO A QUERY FROM HIS OFFICE I HAD EARLIER INDICATED THAT THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF MY REQUEST FOR AN APPOINTMENT WAS TO DISCUSS THE STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS ON ERITREA.

2. THOSE PRESENT AT THE MEETING APRIL 15 INCLUDED THE TWO VICE CHAIRMEN OF THEPMAC, FOREIGN MINISTER KIFLE WODAJO, CAPTAIN SISSAYE HABTE, MOFA'S AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR HAMID, AND DCM WYMAN.

3. AT THE OUTSET I REVIEWED THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE AIDE MEMOIRE COVERING MY CONVERSATION WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER ON MARCH 10. I POINTED OUT THAT THE USG SEVERAL WEEKS AGO HAD HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WITH CERTAIN ARAB COUNTRIES WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF URGING THEM TO EXERT A MODERATING INFLUENCE ON THE REBELS, AND ON THE ARAB SUPPLIERS OF THE REBELS. AT SOME LENGTH I DISCUSSED THE NECESSITY OF OBTAINING ADEQUATE SUPPORT FROM AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND FROM CONGRESS TO SUPPORT OUR POLICY OF PROVIDING ARMS AND AMMUNITION TO ETHIOPIA AT THE PRESENT TIME, POINTING OUT THAT THE PUBLICLY EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS OF THE EPMG TO CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS ON THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WOULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN RELATIONS TO SUCH SUPPORT. I STRESSED USG SUPPORT FOR THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF ETHIOPIA, AND USG REALIZATION THAT ELF PRECONDITIONS TO NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNACCEPTABLE. I UNDERSTOOD WHY THE EPMG HAD BEEN DISTRESSED BY THE PUBLICITY WHICH HAD ATTENDED THE US DECISION TO SELL \$7 MILLION WORTH OF AMMUNITION TO THE EPMG, BUT THE EPMG SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY AND PRESS STATEMENTS CANNOT BE AVOIDED IN OUR SYSTEM, AND THAT WE SEEK TO INSURE ADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF US POLICY C SUPPORT OF ETHIOPIA.

4. I SAID THAT A PUBLIC POSTURE ON THE PART OF THE EPMG CLEARLY INDICATING ITS DESIRE FOR NEGOTIATIONS ON THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WOULD BE OF GREAT HELP NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF US PUBLIC OPINION BUT ALSO IN OTHER COUNTRIES. IT WOULD BE FAR BETTER FOR THE EPMG ITSELF TO CLARIFY ITS VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT PUBLICLY RATHER THAN FOR SPOKESMEN OF THE USG TO BE FORCED, AS THEY INEVITABLY WOULD BE, INTO STATEMENTS OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE EPMG'S
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ATTITUDE. A PUBLIC CLARIFICATION OF THE EPMG'S VIEWPOINT WOULD SERVE ITS OWN INTERESTS IN THIS REGARD AND WOULD ALSO HELP TO GET TALKS STARTED WITH THE REBELS. I WOULD THEREFORE APPRECIATE INFORMATION FROM THE CHAIRMAN NOT ONLY ON THE STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS AT PRESENT, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE IN THIS REGARD, BUT ALSO AS TO WHETHER WE CAN SOON ANTICIPATE A PUBLIC CLARIFICATION BY THE EPMG OF ITS INTENTION TO SEEK A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS.

5. CHAIRMAN TEFERI BANTE SAID THAT THE EPMG IS DETERMINED TO

FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE ERITREAN PROBLEM. IT WAS THE EPMG WHICH HAD FIRST TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO SEEK NEGOTIATIONS THROUGH THE MEDIATION OF PRESIDENT NIMEIRI. CONTACTS WITH THE REBELS HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED AND THE EPMG IS STRIVING TO GET A CLARIFICATION OF REBEL VIEWS. THE MAJOR DIFFICULTY IS THAT OF ASCERTAINING WHAT PEOPLE CAN REALY SPEAK FOR THE ACTUAL REBELS IN THE COUNTRY. ONCE THIS PROBLEM HAS BEEN CLARIFIED, IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO PROCEED WITH MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS.

6. TEFERI BANTE SAID THAT THE EPMG HAS A CONCEPT FOR THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. IT WISHES TO DECENTRALIZE THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, BRINGING POWER CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE AT THE PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS. IT IS WITHIN THIS OVERALL POLICY OF DECENTRALIZATION THAT A SOLUTION EMOBDYING SOME AUTONOMY CAN BE FOUND FOR ERITREA. AT PRESENT THE CIVILIAN NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL, WHICH INCLUDES REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLE AND FROM ALL FOURTEEN PROVINCES, IS STUDYING THE PROBLEM OF MEASURES TO DECENTRALIZE THE GOVERNMENT. THE CHAIRMAN HOPES THAT THE RESULTS OF ITS LABORS WILL SOON BE AVAILABLE.

7. THE CHAIRMAN THEN PRE-EMPTED DISCUSSION WITH A LONG PERORATION ON US ATTITUDES AND ARMS ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA, WHICH IS COVERED IN A SEPARATE TELEGRAM.

8. COMMENT: THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS ARE DISAPPOINTING IN THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL SEEMS TO BE THINKING OF AN EVENTUAL ERITREAN "SOLUTION" WHICH WOULD NOT GO FURTHER THAN ONE WHICH COULD BE APPLIED TO EVERY ONE OF ETHIOPIA'S PROVINCES. HIS COMMENTS ALSO REINFORCE OTHER EVIDENCE INDICATING THAT THE GOVERNMENT FEELS NO URGENCY TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS. HIS CARE TO AVOID MAKING ANY COMMITMENT REGARDING AN EVENTUAL PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE ISSUE
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OF NEGOTIATIONS WAS CONSPICUOUS. WE WILL BE TAKING OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO FOLLOW UP WITH EPMG OFFICIALS ON THIS SUBJECT. DEPT WILL BE BEST JUDGE OF WHETHER CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENTS ON ERITREA CAN BE USEFULLY EMPLOYED TO CONTINUE USG-ARAB DIALOGUE ON ERITREA.
HUMMEL

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